



# *Iowa Outdoors*

Iowa Department of Natural Resources

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**Dec. 13, 2005**

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## **ICE FISHING OFF TO A SLOW START**

By Joe Wilkinson

Iowa Department of Natural Resources

Recent temperatures in the single digits and another inch or so of white stuff have the snowbirds reaching for their cold weather recreation gear. Despite the cold, though, it's probably a little early for most ice anglers.

It's coming, but might be a little while yet before ice thickness is consistent—and safe. “Fresh ice always seems strong, but that snow on it is just like a blanket,” cautions Rod Slings, recreation safety coordinator for the Department of Natural Resources. “It insulates it and ice is not going to build as fast, even with temperatures in the single digits.”

Slings advised packing along a ‘spud bar’ when you do test that ice, smacking the ice with it as you step off shore. “Make sure your first steps are over a shallow depth, and check every couple steps,” urges Slings. “Any water moving under the ice can affect thickness, too.”

Once you're on safe ice, it's a matter of finding the fish. Often, they are wrapping up their fall feeding binge; something that will slow as ice formation chills the water a couple more degrees. Ice fishing across most of Iowa means panfish; crappies,

bluegills...maybe perch or yellow bass if you're on one of the bigger lakes up north or backwaters of the Mississippi River. With a wax worm dropped down the right hole, they may find you. "Many of the fish concentrate in particular areas. They're competing for the resources there and they're hungry right now," notes Kevin Hansen, fisheries technician for the DNR. "That first ice fishing of the year seems like the best. You get good action."

Hansen looks in the deeper waters of the lake or backwater he's fishing. Any structure; branches, ledge or other habitat tend to hold more fish, too. Wax worms or tiny ice fishing jigs are staples for hard-water fishing. "Drop it to the bottom, then pick it up about a foot off the bottom and leave it," suggests Hansen. "You may want to vary your depth, too, if you're not getting anything in 15 or 20 minutes, especially if you are fishing for crappies. And if nothing is biting, you might want to look at different locations."

Fish finding electronics pay off for anglers who are going to be out more than just occasionally through an Iowa winter. "Especially the 'real time' depth finders," advises Hansen. "They save you a lot of time. They produce flashes, and representative color bars as a fish approaches. You can see the depth they are hanging in."

### **'Fish Lift'; From Iowa to New Orleans**

It's a long way down the Mississippi River. When disaster strikes at one end, though, there is help at the other.

With all the death and destruction dealt New Orleans and the Gulf Coast by Hurricane Katrina, the stories of damage and rebuilding continue to unfold. And some Iowa fish are playing a big part in the rebuilding of the world class Audubon Aquarium of the Americas. "Like the rest of New Orleans, (we) suffered some pretty severe damage," recalls John Hewitt, director of husbandry of the world class museum. "When the levee system failed, we were forced to evacuate. With no staff, the life support systems were not functioning properly."

The aquarium lost 10,000 fish; prompting a call for help. "When we close our aquarium here each October, we call the (National Mississippi River Museum and) Aquarium in Dubuque, to see if they want any of the extra fish," says Kevin Hansen, at the DNR's Guttenberg fisheries station. "They told us about the folks in New Orleans, so we gave them some of our (aquarium) fish. Since we were also doing over-winter survey work on the River, we also got fish from the backwaters; bass, bluegill, crappies...some carp; a little bit of everything we could find to send along."

Hewitt and fisheries supervisor Christa Lobue drove to northeast Iowa through last week's snowstorm in 1,000-gallon tanker truck. After taking on the scaly payload at Guttenberg, they swung by the Dubuque Museum/Aquarium for paddlefish, sturgeon and eels. "I cannot imagine the devastation they have seen," admits Abby Garner, from the Dubuque aquarium. "Basically, everything that these people had is gone. We'll help any

way we can. Institutions like this, we help each other out, like a neighbor, knowing they would do the same for us.”

The New Orleans exhibits focus on river systems and oceans of North, Central and South America. Hewitt says Iowa’s contributions will play a big part of the Mississippi River gallery. Officials hope to reopen next summer.

And did he enjoy arriving in Iowa, just as winter hit hard? As they coaxed the truck up the slippery Guttenberg driveway, with fresh ice and snow, it was 8 degrees. In New Orleans that day, it would get up to 80. “It’s interesting. I’m not quite sure how you all deal with this up here on a regular basis,” Hewitt admitted. “But we’ll take the fish down to the other end of the river, where it’s a little warmer.”

### **Reservoir Dropping**

Anglers, snowmobilers and others using the Coralville Reservoir need to be extra cautious over the next few days. The Corps of Engineers is dropping the lake to winter pool levels this week. The drop from 686 feet to 683 feet is to prevent a crust of ice forming with an air pocket below it, as frigid weather set in.

### **Refuge Opens December 20**

The wildlife refuge on the Hawkeye Wildlife Area opens December 20. The 1,400-acre refuge, on the southeast side of the area, is used primarily to hold ducks during the fall migration and hunting seasons. It is off limits to any human activity while posted as a refuge. With winter freeze up arriving, and waterfowl departing, the area will be posted and reopened.

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## **DEER HUNT SET FOR LAKE OF THREE FIRES**

BEDFORD – The Iowa Department of Natural Resources is hosting an antlerless deer only shotgun or muzzleloader hunt at Lake of Three Fires State Park on Jan. 14 and 15. Spaces remain available, but are filling quickly.

Hunters must register for the hunt and attend one of the two safety classes in order to participate. Safety classes will be held in the park office and are scheduled for 7:30 p.m., Jan. 4 and for 10:30 a.m., Jan. 7.

Hunters will have access to the nearly 700 acres of southern Iowa terrain within the park boundary. The park will be closed to other uses during the two-day hunt. Cabin rental is available for \$50 per night for hunters wanting to stay over night in the park.

**For more information, contact Doug Sleep at 712-523-2700.**

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## **CRP “QUAIL and SONGBIRD” BUFFER TO GO STATEWIDE**

DES MOINES – The USDA Farm Service Agency announced that a program they offer to improve habitat for songbirds and quail is now offered throughout the entire state of Iowa.

“This is an excellent opportunity for small and large landowners in the northern half of the state to put in buffers around crop fields,” said Derryl McLaren, State Executive Director of the Iowa USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA).

The program offers landowners incentives and rental payments when they convert part of a crop field to a buffer strip. The buffers provide travel corridors for wildlife and important food and cover, especially during the winter and critical nesting and brood rearing times.

“This continuous Conservation Reserve Program or CRP can help reduce a long-term decline in grassland songbirds and quail populations,” said Todd Bogenschutz, Iowa DNR Upland Game Biologist. “In less than 20 years, from 1980 to 1999, there has been a nationwide decline in quail numbers from an estimated population of 59 million birds to 20 million birds.”

Most grassland songbirds have been declining at a similar rate as quail populations – about two to four percent annually since 1960, added Bogenschutz.

The program offers incentives that pay up to 90 percent of the establishment costs and a \$100 per acre sign-up bonus. Then, throughout the 10 years of the contract, the landowner receives a rental rate based on soil types.

Landowners must install buffers around the edges of existing crop fields, preferably next to woody cover. With an average width of 30 to 120 feet, producers cannot use the buffer for turn rows, roads, or to store crops or equipment.

The DNR has wildlife biologists who can assist with enrollment. Call 515-281-5918 for the name of a biologist near you or contact your local USDA Farm Service Agency County Office or Service Center.

“Iowa has a maximum of 20,000 acres eligible for the sign-up,” said McLaren. “This program has been open to landowners in the southern half of the state since last year, and now we wish to make the maximum use of our eligible acres, so the program will now be offered statewide.”

McLaren adds that if you are interested in the program you should act fast and sign-up at your local Farm Service Agency soon.

**For more information, contact Derryl McLaren at (515) 254-1540 or Todd Bogenschutz at 515-432-2823, or contact your local USDA Service Center.**

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## **IOWA DNR NON-GAME PROGRAM NEEDS YOUR HELP**

BOONE – A recent U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service survey found that nearly half of all Iowans over the age of 16 participate in wildlife viewing activities. Despite the high interest and participation in this non-consumptive recreation, most Iowans do not realize that there is a state program that supports these species.

The wildlife diversity program in the Iowa Department of Natural Resources actively teaches people about landscaping for wildlife, advises management of private lands, bird feeding, where to view wildlife and co-hosts wildlife viewing events.

The program also conducts research on wildlife ranging from frogs and turtles to bats, bald eagles, grassland nesting birds, bobcats, wind farms and breeding birds and has been successful in restoring river otters, peregrine falcons, ospreys and trumpeter swans to the state.

The wildlife diversity program is funded through the Fish/Wildlife Fund (more commonly called the Chickadee Check-off) on the Iowa state income tax forms. These donations help 80 percent of the state's wildlife species, and are used to directly educate more than 25,000 Iowans about natural resources.

As income tax season approaches, please consider donating to the Chickadee Check-off. The wildlife diversity program depends on these donations to help in the conservation of more than 400 non-game species that frequent the state.

**For more information, contact Stephanie Shepherd, Wildlife Diversity Technician, at 515-432-2823 ext. 102.**

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## **ICE FISHING CLINICS SCHEDULED**

DES MOINES – There are 19 free ice fishing clinics are scheduled around Iowa. Activities vary at each clinic, but participants can expect to learn basic safety tips while

on the ice and different ice fishing techniques and bait presentations. Participants should prepare to be outdoors for an extended amount of time. Hats and mittens are essential along with a good pair of boots.

Contact the clinic for more information.

<b>Dec. 29</b>	<b>Youth</b>	<b>Plainfield Lake, Plainfield</b>	<b>319-882-4742</b>
<b>Jan. 7</b>	<b>Youth</b>	<b>Bluebill Wildlife Area, Mason City</b>	<b>641-423-5309</b>
<b>Jan. 7</b>	<b>Youth</b>	<b>Saints Lake and Rec. Area, Waverly</b>	<b>319-882-4742</b>
<b>Jan. 7</b>	<b>Youth</b>	<b>Thomas Marr Lake, Ainsworth</b>	<b>319-657-2400</b>
<b>Jan. 7</b>	<b>Youth</b>	<b>Badger Creek Lake, Van Meter</b>	<b>515-274-2379</b>
<b>Jan. 13</b>	<b>Youth</b>	<b>Lake Meyer, Calmar</b>	<b>563-382-4158</b>
<b>Jan. 14</b>	<b>Youth</b>	<b>Gray's Lake, Des Moines</b>	<b>515-323-5361</b>
<b>Jan. 14</b>	<b>Youth</b>	<b>Lake Catherine, Forest City</b>	<b>641-565-3390</b>
<b>Jan. 21</b>	<b>Youth</b>	<b>Pinicon Ridge Park, Central City</b>	<b>319-892-6485</b>
<b>Jan. 21</b>	<b>All Ages</b>	<b>Fairview, South Dakota</b>	<b>712-552-3057</b>
<b>Jan. 21</b>	<b>Youth</b>	<b>F.W. Kent Park, Tiffin</b>	<b>319-645-1011</b>
<b>Jan. 21</b>	<b>Youth</b>	<b>Arrowhead Park, Neola</b>	<b>712-485-2295</b>
<b>Jan. 21</b>	<b>Youth</b>	<b>Willow Creek, Ocheyedan</b>	<b>712-758-3709</b>
<b>Jan. 28</b>	<b>Youth</b>	<b>Wilson Grove Ponds, Sumner</b>	<b>319-882-4742</b>
<b>Jan. 28</b>	<b>Tournament</b>	<b>Eldred Sherwood Park, Goodell</b>	<b>641-923-2720</b>
<b>Jan. 28</b>	<b>Youth</b>	<b>Lelah Bradley Park, Centerville</b>	<b>641-856-8528</b>
<b>Jan. 28</b>	<b>Youth</b>	<b>Lake Manawa State Park, Council Bluffs</b>	<b>712-366-0220</b>
<b>Jan. 29</b>	<b>Youth</b>	<b>Smith Bay, West Okobojo Lake</b>	<b>712-933-5532</b>
<b>Feb. 4</b>	<b>Tournament</b>	<b>Lake Fontana, Hazleton</b>	<b>319-636-2617</b>
<b>Feb. 5</b>	<b>Tournament</b>	<b>Central Park Lake, Anamosa</b>	<b>563-487-3541</b>
<b>Feb. 11</b>	<b>Youth</b>	<b>F.W. Kent Park, Tiffin</b>	<b>319-645-1011</b>
<b>Feb. 12</b>	<b>Youth</b>	<b>Fort Des Moines Park, Des Moines</b>	<b>515-323-5361</b>

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## **OTTER, BOBCAT TRAPPING SEASONS PROPOSED**

CLEAR LAKE – Iowa wildlife officials feel populations of river otters and bobcats are now strong enough to support a limited harvest of the once-endangered furbearers. Public comment is being sought on the proposal, with a notice of intended action to go before the Natural Resource Commission in March. If approved, seasons would be established in the fall of 2006. Public comment is being accepted through the process, which seeks final approval by June.

The proposal comes as sightings of otters and bobcats, and incidental capture by fur harvesters, increase in Iowa. Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR) furbearer biologist Ron Andrews says the bobcat population is growing at about seven percent a

year. River otter numbers are increasing at six percent annually. Andrews anticipates a limited season with a specified zone for each of the species. The harvest would still allow population growth.

The DNR and Iowa State University are in the third year of an expected six year cooperative study, using radio transmitter collars in a nine-county area in south central Iowa to follow bobcats. At the same time, complaints are being fielded from pond owners and fisheries personnel about growing fish losses, due to increased otter populations.

**For more information, contact Andrews at 641-357-3517.**

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## **TURKEY FEDERATION MONEY AVAILABLE FOR TREE PLANTING**

The Iowa chapter of the National Wild Turkey Federation (NWTF) has money available for tree planting projects. To be eligible for up to \$600 in assistance, landowners need to complete a Habitat Improvement Project Application with the approval of a DNR forester or wildlife biologist and be a member of the NWTF. Application forms for habitat improvement projects can be found at <http://www.iowanwtf.com/news.htm#Habitat>.

“This is a great opportunity for private landowners to make some habitat improvements and get reimbursed by the Turkey Federation for 75-percent of their costs up to \$600,” said Paul Tauke, supervisor with the Iowa Department of Natural Resources forestry bureau.

The NWTF funding could be used in conjunction with other state or federal cost-share programs to lower a landowner’s out-of-pocket expenses for habitat improvement and to purchase tree and shrub seedlings from the State Forest Nursery, Tauke said.

For more information on wildlife habitat packets and planting designs check online at <http://www.iowadnr.com/forestry/specialty.html> or call the State Forest Nursery at 515/233-1161.

If you are not already a NWTF member and would like to join, additional information on NWTF membership can be found at <http://www.iowanwtf.com/> or at <http://www.nwtf.org/>.

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## **KEEPERS OF THE LAND VOLUNTEERS MOVE INDOORS**

DES MOINES – Even with snowfall general across Iowa, volunteers still have a place in natural resources this month. Thanks to several indoor projects, Iowans can serve with the Keepers of the Land, the volunteer program within the Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR).

Stay warm, and still help the great outdoors, by lending a hand with several computer-based projects. The DNR's Communications Bureau could use a few volunteers to help archive its large collection of photos, create a digital photo library and develop a PowerPoint slide library. Volunteers will need basic computer skills. Contact Kevin Baskins at (515) 281-8395 or at [kevin.baskins@dnr.state.ia.us](mailto:kevin.baskins@dnr.state.ia.us) for details.

The DNR's water quality bureau also needs volunteers with basic computer skills. They will help with an electronic formatting project. Contact Wayne Ferrand at (515) 281-8877 or at [wayne.farrand@dnr.state.ia.us](mailto:wayne.farrand@dnr.state.ia.us) for details.

More computer work comes from the DNR's Wildlife Bureau, which needs volunteers to help update and design the Iowa Nature Store's Web page. People with web design and database skills, plus experience with field wildlife observation, would be ideal for this position. Contact Stephanie Shepherd at (515) 432-2823 or at [stephanie.shepherd@dnr.state.ia.us](mailto:stephanie.shepherd@dnr.state.ia.us) for details.

Wildlife officials also invite volunteers to help monitor chronic wasting disease in deer. Volunteers can help by phoning hunters during the evenings to solicit samples or recording information during the day. People interested in helping obtain samples should have experience using knives. Contact Bob Sheets at (563) 652-3131 or at [bob.sheets@dnr.state.ia.us](mailto:bob.sheets@dnr.state.ia.us) for details.

Find out more about these and other Keepers of the Land volunteer opportunities, as well as an on-line events calendar, at our Web-site: [www.keepersoftheland.org](http://www.keepersoftheland.org). All opportunities offer flexible time commitments and schedules.

**For more information, contact Merry Rankin at (515) 281-0878 or at [Merry.Rankin@dnr.state.ia.us](mailto:Merry.Rankin@dnr.state.ia.us).**

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## **THE NATURAL GIFT FOR YEARS OF ENJOYMENT - NATIVE IOWA TREES AND SHRUBS**

AMES – The Iowa Department of Natural Resources forestry bureau has created a gift package of native trees and shrubs available this holiday season. The package was



developed to promote and encourage the planting of more native trees and shrubs for songbird and wildlife habitat.

State foresters, along with several environmental and sportsmen's organizations designed five packets of native trees and shrubs seedlings. The packet, which will be delivered in time for spring planting, will be described in a gift certificate the recipient will open for the holiday.

The native tree and shrub packets available are:

Songbird Packet – 20 trees (8 to 24 inches) for \$20 that is perfect for a larger backyard habitat project. The Songbird Packet includes 2 bur oaks, 2 white pines, 4 wild plum, 4 chokecherry, 4 gray dogwoods and 4 serviceberry and is recommended by Audubon Iowa.

Create-A- Packet – 200 trees (8 to 24 inches) for \$90. Create your own wildlife packet by choosing 4 different tree or shrub species in units of 50 plants. This is great for small acreage owners who have one-half to 1-acre to plant.

Turkey Packet – 200 trees (8 to 24 inches) for \$90. This Turkey packet provides need mast trees for that one-half to 1-acre planting and includes 50 bur oak, 50 white oak, 50 pin oak and 50 gray dogwoods. This packet is recommended by the Iowa Chapter of the National Wild Turkey Federation.

Pheasant Packet – 200 trees (8 to 24 inches) for \$90. This Pheasant packet provides food and winter cover and includes 50 redcedar, 50 wild plums, 50 ninebark and 50 gray dogwoods and is recommended by the Iowa Pheasants Forever chapters.

Quail Packet – 200 trees (8 to 24 inches) for \$90. This Quail packet provides food and winter cover and includes 100 wild plum and 100 gray dogwood and is recommended by Iowa DNR wildlife biologists

Orders must be received by Dec. 20 to allow enough time to for the gift certificate to be delivered for the holidays. Orders are accepted by phone, e-mail, and regular mail. Do not send money with the order, a bill will be sent later. Checks, VISA and MasterCard are accepted.

You could also purchased for yourself this gift of nature. It also makes a wonderful housewarming gift. Please support our efforts to expand songbird and wildlife habitat for today and for tomorrow by giving a gift of Iowa's nature.

To order, call the State Forest Nursery at 1-800-865-2477 Monday through Friday 8 AM to 4:30 PM, Fax at 515-233-1131 or go on line to [www.iowadnr.com/forestry/](http://www.iowadnr.com/forestry/).

If you need more information about tree planting programs and assistance in Iowa check out [www.iowatreeplanting.com](http://www.iowatreeplanting.com).

**For more information, contact John Walkowiak at 515-242-5966.**

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